POWER OF THE PEOPLE:
Lawrence and Fair Housing

On July 18, 1967, Lawrence adopted City Ordinance 2748. This law made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin in the purchase or rental of housing. Securing these fair housing protections in Lawrence marked a victory for a grassroots effort driven by people determined to end practices of segregation and spurred on by the Kansas legislature’s failure to pass a statewide fair housing bill a year earlier. This exhibit tells the story of their efforts and how people working together can be a force for positive change in our community.

STRUGGLES AND SETBACKS

Founded during the nation’s struggle over the spread of slavery in the 1850s, Lawrence emerged as the center of the abolitionist movement in Kansas Territory. The city’s abolitionist heritage created a climate of freedom from discrimination. Despite its progressive attitude, Lawrence was not immune to the prejudice and violence directed at those who supported the Civil War. In the early 1920s, segregation was common—blacks could not eat in some restaurants, could not attend the same schools, or use the same parks. A red line was drawn on a map of Lawrence, which was known as “all white.”

In 1960, Lawrence’s black and Latino communities were well-organized. John McKeithen, an African American (AF), student and former NAACP leader, took active roles in several discrimination practices at the University of Kansas, including organizing protests against the University’s requirement that student athletes spend time in the army. After World War II, opportunities began to open up for African Americans and Latinos. One institution which opened its doors to blacks was the University of Kansas. Lawrence’s black community, called the “East Side,” started attending the University after the war.

In 1966, a local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was formed in Lawrence. CORE was dedicated to ending segregation and used direct action to challenge the policies of social and political gains. CORE was not an overnight success. It began with a small group of core activists and expanded to include other groups and organizations. CORE’s goal was to challenge the University’s policies and practices and to fight for the end of segregation.

As and efforts to promote spread across the nation in the 1960s, community organizations like Lawrence became more active. In 1967, the Lawrence chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) protested the admission of the white-only Johnson High School. The NAACP’s goal was to end segregation and to promote equality in education. The fight for desegregation continued throughout the decade, with more protests and demonstrations, including the integration of the University of Kansas and the University of Kansas Medical Center.

In 1970, after years of civil rights and student movements, black students of the University of Kansas were finally admitted to the University. This victory was the result of years of hard work and dedication by Lawrence community members and activists. It was a turning point in the fight for fair housing and a testament to the power of collective action.
TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ACTIVISM

#1 ORGANIZE

- Plan events or use social media to call attention to the issues
- Engage with people one-on-one about the issues
- Build a coalition of support
- Find resources to cover expenses like feeding volunteers, mailings, protest signs, or flyers
- Support volunteers by arranging for transportation or childcare

CHANGE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

The push for fair housing legislation arose as part of a national civil rights movement fighting against segregation and discrimination. In Lawrence, individuals and groups organized to voice their opposition against unfair housing practices. Several churches, members of the University of Kansas staff, and the Lawrence community all approved for housing protection. Their opposition was strong and vocal, and it helped to bring about significant change in the local housing market.

In 1964, the Lawrence branch of the NAACP was established. The Lawrence branch, which included the Lawrence and social justice-oriented African American community, was involved in efforts to secure fair housing. The NAACP worked closely with the local community to ensure that fair housing practices were upheld and that discrimination was reduced. The NAACP also brought attention to the broader issue of civil rights and the importance of housing justice.

In 1968, the United States Supreme Court case of United States v. Board of Education of Batavia, Illinois, established that discrimination in housing was a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This case helped to shape the legal framework for addressing housing discrimination and ensured that fair housing practices were upheld.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many communities across the country faced housing discrimination. These efforts led to the passage of the Fair Housing Act of 1988, which prohibited discrimination in housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, and disability. These efforts were crucial in achieving significant change in the housing market.

In conclusion, the push for fair housing legislation arose as part of a broader national civil rights movement. The Lawrence community played a significant role in advocating for fair housing practices and曲了 the legal framework for addressing discrimination in housing. These efforts helped to achieve significant change in the housing market and ensured that fair housing practices were upheld.
TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ACTIVISM

#3 PERSUADE

- Prepare for meetings in advance
- Present your concerns and personal encounters with the issue, propose solutions concisely
- Leave written copies of your proposals and contact information
- Follow up with letters, emails, and telephone calls from your contact to illustrate widespread support
- Time your follow-up activities to coordinate with legislative sessions

WORKING FOR YOU

Avoid the mistakes of the late 1950s and early 1960s when the Lawrence City Commissioners closed the Lawrence Human Relations Commission (LHRC). Since 1964, the LHRC has preserved a rich and valuable collection of information on Lawrence’s history. In 1964, the Lawrence City Commissioners, the LHRC, and the development of the City Ordinance 333, which prohibited the denial, manage, or any form of public accommodations, including hotels, restaurants, waiting rooms, and other places of accommodations, from providing services or access to facilities based on race, creed, color, or national origin. Over time, the LHRC has come to address issues of discrimination based not only on race, but also on sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, gender identity, or family status.

The LHRC takes pride in the same sense it was created in 1964, “to open the door for each individual, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin, to enjoy equal treatment in all public accommodations and housing.” The LHRC also desires the problem of discrimination and other matters that impact community statutes or may have an adverse effect on good will and cooperation among the various groups that make up the population of Lawrence. Members volunteer their services and are appointed by the mayor or the council.

Until everyone has equal access to housing, employment, and public accommodations, the work of the Human Relations Committee is still highly important in the community.”

Staff Chair, Lawrence Human Relations Committee, 2019-2022

City of Lawrence HUMAN RELATIONS

WATKINS MUSEUM of HISTORY

MAP OF THE CITY OF LAWRENCE

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